decided that NREGA would be initially implemented in 200 districts. With the implementation of NREGA, the existing schemes for employment generation, i.e. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) would be subsumed in the NREGA. Mid-day Meal Scheme has been universalized at primary level w.e.f. 1st September, 2004. All the States are implementing Mid-day Meals at primary level. The target is to reduce drop out rates at primary level by 5 percentage points or increase retention by 1.5 million per annum.

Double digit growth rate

3304. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA:
SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether in an address at the Indian Economic Summit held during the last week of November, 2005, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission is reported to have observed that double digit growth was not possible in India because of the constraints of coalitional policies;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN): (a) and (b) At the Indian Economic Summit, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission was questioned whether coalition politics would not allow 10% growth. In reply the Deputy Chairman stated that we should first get to sustainable 8% growth over a period of time, which in his view was feasible with a coalition government. A 10% growth rate can be considered after 8% is achieved on a sustained basis.

(c) The growth rate target for a Five year Plan are decided by the National Development Council.

Balanced development of North-Eastern Region

3305. SHRI B.J. PANDA:
PROF. R.B.S. VARMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether North-Eastern Region, including Sikkim despite being rich in mineral resources and forests has lagged behind from the rest of the country;

(b) whether Government propose to undertake various initiatives to bring these States at par with others;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether Government are aware that Orissa State is also similarly placed and it continues to be in the pangs of poverty and has the lowest per capita income in the country next only to Bihar; and

(e) if so, what is the action plan of Government to reduce the imbalance in development of this State as well?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN): (a) to (c) The process of development had been slow in the North-Eastern region as compared to the rest of the country for many reasons. The development process had been hampered due to sensitive geographical location, natural calamities, political evolution etc. Additionally some of the North-Eastern States commenced participation in planned development somewhat late. Accordingly, the NE region did not benefit early form strategies adopted for infrastructure improvement and provisioning of basic minimum services.

Recognizing the special problems of the region and need for significant levels of investment North-Eastern States are categorized as Special Category States and Central assistance is extended for State development plans of softer terms. As a follow-up on 'New Initiatives for the North-Eastern Region' announced in October 1996, it was made mandatory to earmark lat least 10% of the budgets of Central Ministries/Department' towards development of North-Eastern States. subsequently, with the passing of Union Budget 1998-99, a Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) was created comprising the funds from the unspent balances of 10% of budgetary allocations. The NE States were to pursue priority development projects with the assistance available under NLCPR.

An institution dedicated towards planning and development of the NE region is the North-Eastern Council (NEC), established in1972 under an Act of Parliament. NEC has been making investments in infrastructure projects and other social development programmes in the region.

(d) and (e) yes, Sir, Orissa is among some of the most backward and poverty ridden States. The 1999-2000 estimates of Planning Commission indicated that Orissa has the highest percentage of BPL population followed by Bihar. As per the Per Capital NSDP (2003-04) estimates at current prices, Bihar has the lowest per capita NSDP at Rs. 5780 followed by Orissa at Rs. 12388.

Central Governemnt has been supplementing the development efforts of the State Government through concessional Central Assistance for various Special Area Programmes aiming at focused development of identified backward areas and also various poverty alleviation and other schemes.

During the Tenth Plan, Programmes like Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY) were initiated with the objective of reducing imbalances in the development of backward areas. The RSVY programme focuses on livelihood support, road connectivity, services for health and education, etc. The programme also addresses problems of low agricultural productivity, unemployment and bridging of critical gaps in physical and social infrastructure. Some identified backward districts of Orissa are covered under the programme.

In 2005-06 the Backward Regions Grant Fund was established and the RSVY programme has now been subsumed under the programme. The new programme would protect the interest of the already identified backward areas/districts of the State.

Package for SSIs

3306. MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Punjab Government has asked the Central Government for a special financial package for Small Scale Units in the State;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government also propose to consider such a package for backward poverty-stricken States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa to develop this sector to improve the economy of these regions; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN): (a) No Sir, Punjab Govt. has not asked the Central Govt. for a special financial package for Small Scale units in the State.

(b) Question does not arise.